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SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY AND CRIME IN WEST VIRGINIA

**Thesis Submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
Sociology**

by

Billy Crum

**Dr. Kenneth Ambrose, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Richard Garnett
Dr. Fred Roth**

Marshall University

12/05/03

Abstract

Social Disorganization Theory and Crime in West Virginia

By Billy Crum

The purpose of this study is to test the social disorganization theory by determining how a community's ability to maintain social control effects crime rate, especially in areas of West Virginia that are experiencing rapid social change. Do lack of social controls and rapid social change effect crime rates in rural areas, and if so, what kinds of crimes are likely to be effected? This study is going to attempt to answer this puzzling question. This study uses poverty rate, unemployment rate, and high school dropout rate as the independent variables, and crime rate as the dependent variable.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2 Social Disorganization.....	5
Chapter 3 Review of Literature.....	9
Chapter 4 Methodology.....	16
Chapter 5 Analysis of Data.....	29
Chapter 6 Significance of Study and Limitations.....	33
Bibliography.....	38

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to test the social disorganization theory by determining how a community's ability to maintain social control effects crime rate, especially in areas of West Virginia that are experiencing rapid social change. Social control refers to the ability of a group or collectivity to engage in self-regulation and protect itself from threats and disruption (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993).

Do lack of social controls and rapid social change effect crime rates in rural areas, and if so, what kinds of crimes are likely to be effected? This study is going to attempt to answer this puzzling question. There are many studies that have addressed crime in urban areas; however, there are only a limited number of studies that examine crime in rural areas. This is one of the primary reasons for the direction of this research.

Social disorganization theory, after being disregarded for many years, has recently received increasing attention from scholars. This study is going to incorporate this theory to explore how social control and rapid social change effect deviance and criminal behavior, to see if social disorganization theory accounts for current crime rates in West Virginia. The state of West Virginia is primarily rural because of geographical features; however, there have been a lot of rapid social changes occurring in certain areas of the state. Areas that were once isolated, are now being exposed to a lot of outside influences and urbanization. Improved highways, increased access to the media, and population mobility (people having to leave in order to find work) have all contributed to this breakdown of rural isolation.

This study is interested in finding out if this decreased isolation, which would affect levels of social control by lessening community ties, has led to increased crime

rates, because it would support the social disorganization theory. Another important issue this study wishes to address is the types of social controls that influence delinquent behavior. Social controls can take many different forms and can occur at many different levels, but all heavily influence behavior at the community level.

II. SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

Social disorganization theory is a useful framework for examining the social problems that are being addressed in this study. Social disorganization theory conceives of rapid social change as the cause for breakdowns in community social controls, increasing the deviance. Social disorganization theory comes from an even larger set of theories known as social structural theories. These theories attempt to explain the relationship between the structural features of social organization and the incidence of criminal activities. It is useful, therefore, to describe the development of the social disorganization theory and its application.

The spatial dimension of crime and delinquency and its relationship to environmental factors has enjoyed a long tradition in criminology (Shaw, 1952). An important characteristic of this early research was the use of charts and maps to show spatial distributions of crime and delinquency (Shaw, 1952). These research methods were known as the “Cartographic School” approach. This approach broke away from the tradition of using biological inferiority as a causal explanation of crime. Research within this tradition supported environmental explanations for crime and social ills; however, this approach was unable to develop a fundamental theory that contributed to the explanation of these results (Shaw, 1969). Instead, the findings were often used to point out a lack of morality in specific population groups (Shoemaker, 1996).

Devised by the Chicago School of sociology in the early 1920's, social disorganization theory suggests that the erosion of the influence of traditional institutions over individuals initiated social change known as "social disorganization". It can be defined as the decline of influence of existing social rules of behavior upon individuals within a group (Shaw, 1952). Basically a community's inability to realize common objectives to solve the problems of its residents is a consequence of social disorganization, resulting in the breakdown of effective social control within the community. This theory claimed that delinquency was not caused at the individual level, but was considered to be the normal response of normal individuals to abnormal social conditions (Short, 1976). As a result, there was an indirect loss in the ability to act communally and individuals exhibited unrestricted freedom to express their dispositions and desires, often causing crime and delinquency (Short, 1976).

It was believed that social organization involved an integration of customs, teamwork, high morale, and bonding. This led to pleasant social relationships. A group characterized by these qualities demonstrated solidarity, homogeneousness and conventional behavior. Social disorganization theory proposes that social order, stability, and integration are conducive to conformity, while disorder and segregation facilitate crime and delinquency (Shaw, 1969). A social system is considered organized if it has an internal consensus of its norms and values, a strong cohesion among its members, and there is an orderly social interaction. A system is considered disorganized if there is a breakdown in social control, a disruption in its cohesion, or a lack of integration. This disorganization, in turn causes higher rates of deviance and crime rates.

The link with delinquency and social disorganization was associated with the work of two sociologists, Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay. Affiliated with the University of Chicago and the Illinois Institute for Social Research, Shaw and McKay were primarily interested in crime and delinquency. Their intention was to show how crime was a normal response to the social, structural, and cultural characteristics of a community and to explain how deviance was produced among lower class, urban males (Shaw, 1969). Together, they produced a collection of books and reports that illustrated the distribution of delinquency rates in Chicago and that discussed the processes associated with delinquent values and traditions. Emile Durkheim, who looked at levels of social integration and societal solidarity, influenced their work. Shaw and McKay's work was also influenced by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, whose work in urban ecology produced the Concentric Zone Model of urban growth.

The Concentric Zone Model introduced an ecological analysis of crime causation. Ecology is the study of animals and plants and how they relate to one another in their natural habitat. Park and Burgess then examined area characteristics instead of individual criminals for their explanations of high crime. They developed the idea of natural urban areas, which consisted of concentric zones, which extended out from downtown central business districts to commuter zones, or suburbs, at the fringes of the city (Shoemaker, 1996). Next to the business district was the transitional zone, made up of deteriorated housing, factories, and abandoned buildings. In the middle was the working class zone, comprised of single-family tenements. The residential zone lay between the working class zone and the commuter zone, and consisted of single-family homes with yards and garages. Each zone had its own structure and organization,

characteristics and unique inhabitants. The poorest areas were located in the central business district, while the more prosperous areas are located in the suburbs.

Shaw and McKay used their analysis to describe the distribution of juvenile delinquency in detail and to explain why it was already dispersed in urban areas (Shoemaker, 1996). Shaw and McKay believed strongly that overcoming social disorganization was possible through efforts of immigrant groups to relocate to more desirable residential areas (Short, 1976). Shaw and McKay played an important role in the merging of fact with theory in the area of delinquency research. Their explanations represent the earliest modern sociological and social psychological explanations of crime and delinquency. The concepts, hypotheses, and research produced from these theories have influenced the analysis of crime and delinquency for most of the twentieth century (Short, 1976).

Shaw and McKay believed that the social disorganization concept could be applied to the passage of nationality groups through a spatial grid in the city. Discovering a strong association between census tracts and crime rates, Shaw and McKay explored the delinquency problem in the inner-city areas of Chicago within the setting of traditional institutional efforts to control the behavior of the younger generation and the generations to come (Short, 1976). Their dependent variables were delinquency rates from Chicago, which were measured by arrests, court appearances, and court adjudications of institutional commitment. Their independent variables were economic conditions by square-mile areas, ethnic heterogeneity, and population turnover. These variables were based on where delinquents lived and consisted of 10 to 16 year-old males who were petitioned to juvenile court (Shoemaker, 1996).

There are four distinct assumptions of social disorganization as an explanation for crime and delinquency (Shoemaker, 1996). First, delinquency is mainly the consequence of a collapse of institutional, community-based controls. The people who live in these situations are not personally disoriented; instead, they are viewed as responding naturally to disorganized environmental conditions. Second, the disorganization of community-based institutions is often a result of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration processes that occur primarily in urban areas. Third, the effectiveness of social institutions and the desirability of residential and business locations correspond closely to natural, ecological principles that are influenced by concepts of competition and dominance. This assumption associates the term “ecological approach” with the social disorganization explanation of crime and delinquency. The fourth assumption is that socially disorganized areas disrupt conventional social controls and leads to the development of self-perpetuating criminal values and norms (Shoemaker, 1996).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many different theories and approaches that look at the relationship between levels of social control, rapid social change, and crime. The attempt to connect levels of social control and change, by examining factors such as poverty, unemployment, high school dropout rates, to crime rates focuses on the relationship between factors such as malnutrition, unsanitary dwellings or habitats and congested living, and involvement in illegal activities as a result of despair associated with the inability to cope effectively with these conditions (Fagan, 1995). Some early studies concluded that there is a relationship between the levels of social control, rapid social

change, and crime. For example, Quetelet (1835) argued that crime is especially significant in areas with rapid social or economic change, rather than in areas where people are poor but are able to satisfy their basic needs (Sillars, 1998). Shaw and McKay (1969) also concluded that poverty, in itself, does not seem to cause crime, because crime rates do not consistently change with the number of poor people in a given area (Sillars, 1998).

Nevertheless, there is some evidence that studying poverty may be important, because it is a good indicator of social disorganization and affects a community's ability to maintain social control. Reduced to its common denominator, the relationship between poverty and crime suggests that those who occupy the lowest stratum of society have the greatest incentives to commit crimes because of their deprivation. More subtly, but more importantly, poverty, taken in the sense of absolute wants, undermines the social sentiments and erodes all relations between men (Fadaei, 1990). Phillips (1991) argues that pressure of poverty and unemployment can create individual irresponsibility, and correspondingly deviance, especially when people suffer stress from lack of power or when they are unable to control their own lives. She concludes that economic independence for the poor is the single most crucial element in any plan to fight either crime or poverty. If a relationship between these levels of social controls, rapid social change and crime can be directly linked so that the association between them is understood, then better programs and policies could be implemented in order to help decrease these social problems.

Robert J. Bursik and Harold Grasmick (1993) summarize a long tradition of social disorganization theory research in their monograph, "Neighborhoods and Crime". They

offer a model, developed by Albert Hunter (1985), that identifies a system of three levels of social control within neighborhoods: private control (families and other intimate primary groups), parochial control (school, churches, and other local institutions), and public control (policing and other municipal services). According to their work, neighborhoods differ in their capacities to mobilize these levels of social control; the greater the social control the lower the level of crime. Whereas Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) emphasize individual self-control, Bursik and Grasmick highlight the neighborhood's ability to exert control over its residents. Control remains a central idea, but the focus has shifted from the individual to the community. Their primary orientation was on the ability of neighborhoods to control themselves and their environment through formal and informal relational networks so that the risk of crime is minimized.

The literature that discusses the social disorganization theory and the contextual nature of crime in metropolitan areas is extensive. There are fewer sources, however, that examine non-metropolitan areas. One such source explores violent and property crime rates in non-metropolitan counties (Barnett & Mencken, 2002). According to this study, crime rates are lower in these counties because of higher levels of social integration. The authors suggest that predictors of crime from social disorganization theory exert different effects on violent and property crimes at different levels of population change in non-metropolitan counties. Using a spatial lag regression model to predict the average violent and property crime rates for these counties, the results showed that a factor-analyzed index of resource disadvantage (poverty rate, income inequality, unemployment, percent female-headed households) has different effects on both violent and property crime at different levels of population change in non-metropolitan counties.

Contrary to expectations, the study found that resource disadvantage exerts a greater positive effect on both violent and property crimes in non-metropolitan counties for those that lost population between 1980 and 1990.

According to the study, one of the most consistent findings from the limited body of literature on non-metropolitan crime is that population change has a direct relationship with crime rates (Jones, 1991). This finding is expected: sociological theory assumes that levels of social integration are higher in non-metropolitan (rural) areas than in metropolitan (urban) areas. These ideas are found in Tonnies's concept of *Gemeinschaft* and in Durkheim's mechanical view of rural communities, in which social cohesion is based on a collective consciousness and shared moral sentiments (Barnett and Carson, 2002). Building on the systemic model of community attachment (Goudy, 1990), criminologists argue that the level of social integration in rural communities creates a system of social control that holds behavior in check and keeps crime rates lower.

Many of the studies, using social disorganization theories that have addressed how social control affects crime are inconclusive (Fadaei, 1990). Social disorganization theories look at levels of social integration within a society or community to explain high or low crime rates. Crime rates, according to this theory, will depend on a community's ability to establish formal and informal connections among members in order to realize common values and work towards solving or preventing social problems (Gest and Friedman, 1994). Communities with high levels of social integration, such as rural, non-metropolitan areas, generally have lower crime rates, while communities with low levels of social integration, like urban, metropolitan areas, have higher crime rates. Poverty is not directly linked with crime rates according to this theory.

The concept of social integration is a prominent theme in social disorganization theory (Kornhauser 1978). Accordingly, community crime rates are a function of a community's ability to establish formal and informal connections among members so as to realize common values and work towards solving or preventing social problems (Barnett and Carson, 2002). The major structural or community-level concepts that impede this process are residential stability or mobility, economic hardship (low SES), and racial/ethnic heterogeneity (Bursik, 1994). More recently, family structure or disruption and income inequality have been included in the social disorganization models (Bursik, 1994). The social disorganization theory states that these structural conditions (low socioeconomic status, residential stability or mobility, and population heterogeneity), all of which are linked with poverty, affect crime indirectly through their effects on the community social organization: the formation of local friendship networks, the ability to control local adolescent populations, and levels of civic engagement (Bursik 1999; Kornhauser 1978; Sampson and Groves 1989; Warner and Rountree 1997).

Communities with high levels of social organization, those with extensive informal kin and friendship networks and extensive formal network structures through civic participation, are more likely to realize common values and to work toward solving or preventing social problems. According to Sampson and Groves (1989), socioeconomic hardship impedes social organization because low SES (socioeconomic status) communities have a weaker organizational base. Such communities lack the financial and human capital resources to identify and protect community interests and to provide activities for teenagers (Bursik, 1988). Furthermore, low SES communities may lack the adequate ties to criminal justice agencies and to other entities that are needed to

acquire government resources (Warner, 1997). People in poverty and those with low levels of education are also less likely to participate in voluntary organizations, such as neighborhood associations focused on crime or community issues.

Residential stability promotes social organization because stability is important for the formation and maintenance of formal and informal social networks among community members. Residential mobility weakens social relations among community members and diminishes the ability to maintain an organized community through informal social control (Smith, 1988). Communities with high levels of residential mobility will not have the same interconnections among community members, nor display the same levels of civic engagement. Suburban communities, despite high rates of residential mobility, can become interconnected more easily because of the many social functions and activities that are taking place within these types of neighborhoods. However, involvement in these social activities depends on many factors, and often participation is limited to only a small percentage of the total population, usually those who are economically advantaged, within the community. These social functions and activities in no way make up for the lack of connectedness that can be caused by population mobility. It takes time to integrate newcomers into existing communities or structures, and when people leave, a part of the local network structure or community is lost. People are going to be less likely to establish relationships in communities in which there is considerable turnover (Crutchfield, 1982).

In regard to other structural dimensions of the social disorganization model Wilson (1987) and Sampson (1986) both propose that income inequality results in an increase in social disorganization and a decrease in community stability. Communities

with greater income inequality represent situations where communications across groups with different incomes will be more difficult, just as communication is difficult across ethnic and racially diverse populations (Sampson and Groves 1989). This situation impedes consensus on local values and norms, and reduces a community's ability to identify common interests and to impose the norms of social control.

In previous studies utilizing a social disorganization framework, many structural measures exerted inconsistent effects on crime rates (Fowles and Land 1990). The studies that have examined the non-metropolitan nature of homicide and of violent and property crime have also found inconsistent findings and unexpected results regarding many measures of economic hardship and socioeconomic status (Jones 1986; Kowalski 1993; Duffield 1995; and Kposowa 1992). For example, Kposowa (1992) show that population change, percent native American, percent black, and the county poverty rate predicted the 1980 homicide rates in counties with populations of fewer than 20,000 people. Kposowa (1995) further shows that population change, poverty, ethnic/racial composition all exert expected effects on the 1980 homicide rates in the least populated 1681 counties. Other measures from social disorganization and other structural research, however, produce inconsistent or unexpected results. Kposowa (1995) found that poverty had a positive effect on homicide rate, but no effect on the property crime rate. In contrast, Kowalski (1993), in a test of social disorganization theory, found no net effect of low income on violent crimes in rural counties. Osgood and Chambers (2000) also report no consistent effects of poverty on juvenile arrests for most Uniform Crime Reports index crimes in their sample of non-metropolitan counties. They further reported

that that income inequality exerts an unexpected negative effect on the 1980 homicide rate, net of a positive effect of poverty.

These various studies have been used to explain how varying levels of social control and social change influence crime rates. Of course these are only a few examples of the studies used to examine social disorganization. The evidence strongly suggests that there is some relationship between social control, rapid social change and crime. There are many different variables to consider when studying social disorganization and each should be examined more closely to determine if their explanations are valid.

IV. METHODS

Data were collected by means of secondary analysis. This data collection procedure was chosen because of convenience, low cost, and data availability.

This study, drawn from Albert Hunter's design (1985), is going to use a three-level approach to examine social control. The first level, or "private level", is grounded in the intimate informal primary groups that exist in the area, such as family and friends. Within such groups, social control is usually achieved through the allocation or threat of withdrawal of sentiment, social support, and mutual esteem (Black, 1989). The second level, or "parochial level", represents the effects of broader local interpersonal networks and the interlocking of local institutions for social control, such as churches, schools and other neighborhood institutions (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). The third level, or "public level", focuses on the ability of a community to secure public goods and services that are provided by agencies located outside of the community. Social control at this level looks at policing and other municipal agencies, as well as the ability of a neighborhood to provide jobs and raise funds for needed services.

Areas of rapid social change should experience increases in crime rates according to this theory, because they reduce the ability of the community to maintain social control. The independent variables for this study are poverty rates, unemployment rates, and high school drop out rates because these factors have been found, in other studies, to be good indicators or measures of areas experiencing social disorganization, because they directly and indirectly influence a community's ability to maintain social control. The dependent variable was crime rate, specifically the part II offenses. All part II offenses had to be included into the crime rate, because in many cases so few incidents of arrests were reported for particular types of crimes, if they were reported at all, that the results appeared insignificant. This study is going to use poverty as a measure of social control for the private level, high school dropout rate as a measure of social control for the parochial level, and unemployment as a measure of social control for the public level.

The study examined a ten year period, from 1989 to 1998, looking at crime rates, high school dropout rates, unemployment rates, and poverty rates for eight pre-selected counties, in order to get an accurate understanding of the fluctuating levels of social control for each. The eight counties in the study were Cabell, Kanawha, Wayne, Putnam, Fayette, McDowell, Doddridge, and Pendleton and were selected based on geographic location and the likelihood of experiencing rapid social change. The objective was to establish if there was a connection between rising crime rates, augmented poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rates.

Cabell and Kanawha County were selected because they are the most industrialized and urbanized counties in the state. Wayne, Putnam, and Fayette County were selected because these counties border Cabell and Kanawha, and are directly

affected by their rapid social change, growth, and urbanization, making them more susceptible to social disorganization and its effects. McDowell, Doddridge, and Pendleton County were selected because they are primarily rural, and should be largely isolated from rapid social change. These counties were also selected because they are spread out geographically across the state, to minimize regional effects within the state when obtaining the data.

This study then divided the counties into three separate categories for comparison: urbanized counties, counties surrounding the urbanized counties, and rural, isolated counties. The comparison looked at poverty, unemployment, high school dropout and crime rates to determine if indeed the counties bordering the more urbanized or metropolitan counties were experiencing higher crime rates, due to rapid growth and a breakdown of community ties. Counties experiencing higher unemployment, poverty, and high school dropout rates should also have increased crime rates according to the theoretical framework used in the study.

Essentially the position of this study is that increases in poverty, high school dropout and unemployment will increase the probability that social disorganization will occur, in turn, increasing the likelihood that individuals will engage in criminal activities. Knowing more about how poverty and unemployment effect crime would enable us to gain a better understanding of how to reduce both crime rate and poverty in this state, country, and around the globe.

The official definition of the unemployment rate, given below in a series of four definitions, contains a couple of unavoidable complications. 1) A person who loses a 40 hour per week job, but works for one hour mowing a lawn for pay is considered

employed. 2) A person who simply expresses interest in having a job is classified as unemployed. “Discouraged workers” who have lost a job, but do not make an effort to find a new job in a given week are not classified as unemployed or even in the labor force. Both of these problems mean that the announcement of unemployment rate is not as definitive as it might sound.

Nonetheless, the unemployment rate is defined as the number of unemployed persons divided by the labor force, where the labor force is the number of unemployed persons plus the number of employed persons. The official definitions of these figures are as follows.

Employed persons, from the current population survey, are persons 16 years and over in the civilian non-institutional population who, during the reference week, a) did any work at all (at least one hour) as paid employees, worked in their own business, profession, or on their own farm, or worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers in an enterprise operated by a member of the family, and b) all of those not working but who had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent because of vacation, illness, bad weather, childcare problems, maternity or paternity leave, labor-management dispute, job training, or other family or personal reasons, whether or not they were paid for the time off or were seeking other jobs. Each employed person is counted only once, even if he or she holds more than one job. Excluded are persons whose only activity consisted of work around their own house (painting, repairing, or own home housework) or volunteer work for religious, charitable, and other organizations.

Unemployed persons are persons 16 years and over who had no employment during the reference week, were available for work, except for temporary illness, and had

made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the four week period ending with the reference week. Persons who were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been laid off need not have been looking for work to be classified as unemployed.

The labor force, under the current population survey, includes all persons classified as employed or unemployed in accordance with the definitions provided above. Unemployment rate represents the number unemployed as a percent of the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The poverty rate in this study was based on the definition from the Census Bureau. The data on poverty status was derived from income data. Income used to compute poverty status includes: earnings, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, social security, supplemental security income, public assistance, veteran's payments, survivor benefits, pension or retirement income, interest dividends, rents, royalties, income from estates, trusts, educational assistance, alimony, child support, assistance from outside the household, and other miscellaneous sources. Poverty statistics presented in census publications were based on a definition originated by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently modified by Federal interagency committees in 1969 and 1980 and prescribed by the Office of Management and Budget in Directive 14 as the standard to be used by Federal agencies for statistical purposes.

At the core of this definition was the 1961 economy food plan, the least costly of four nutritionally adequate food plans designed by the Department of Agriculture. It was determined from the Agricultural Department's 1955 survey of food consumption that

families of three or more persons spend approximately one-third of their income on food; hence, the poverty level for these families was set at three times the cost of the economy food plan. For smaller families and persons living alone, the cost of the economy food plan was multiplied by factors that were slightly higher to compensate for the relatively larger fixed expenses for these smaller households.

The income cutoffs used by the Census Bureau to determine poverty status of families of unrelated individuals included a set of 48 poverty thresholds arranged in a two-dimensional matrix consisting of family size (from one person to nine or more persons) cross-classified by presence and number of family members under 18 years old (from no children present to eight or more children present). Poverty thresholds are the dollar amounts used to determine poverty status. Unrelated individuals and two-person families were further differentiated by the age of the householder (under 65 years old and 65 years old and over). Although these thresholds in some sense reflect families' needs, they are intended for use as a statistical "yardstick", not as a complete definition or description of what people and families need to live.

The total income of each family or unrelated individuals in the sample is tested against the appropriate poverty threshold to determine the poverty status of that family or unrelated individual. If the total income is less than the corresponding cutoff, the family or unrelated individual is classified as "below the poverty level". The number of persons below the poverty level is the sum number of persons in families with incomes below the poverty level and the number of unrelated individuals with incomes below the poverty level. If total family income equals or is greater than the threshold, the family (or unrelated individual) is not in poverty.

The poverty thresholds are revised annually to allow for changes in the cost of living as reflected in the Consumer Price Index. The same thresholds are used throughout the United States and do not vary geographically. Poverty status is determined for all persons except institutionalized persons, persons in military group quarters and in college dormitories, and unrelated individuals under 15 years old. These groups are also excluded from the denominator when calculating poverty rates.

Crime rates are calculated in this study by dividing the total number of offenses per one thousand/ population. The adoption of the Federal System of Uniform Crime Reporting includes the utilization of the offense classification of that system. Law enforcement in West Virginia has made accurate application of these classifications in the reports submitted to the West Virginia Uniform Crime Reporting System. The crime statistic data from this study came from the West Virginia State Police crime reports. Crime is divided into two different types of offenses, part I and part II.

Part I offenses, or crimes, are those serious crimes that are usually reported to law enforcement agencies. They consist of the following offenses; homicide, forcible rape, robbery, assault, breaking and entering, larceny theft (excluding auto theft), motor vehicle theft, and arson.

Part II offenses are made up of all other crimes not classified as Part I crimes. Information on Part II Offenses is only reported when an arrest has been made. Part II crimes for Uniform Crime Report purposes includes; simple assault, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property (including buying, possessing, and receiving), vandalism, weapons (carrying, possessing, etc.), prostitution and commercialized vice, sex offenses, narcotics, gambling, offenses against the family

(desertion, neglect, etc.), driving under the influence (DUI), liquor laws, drunkenness (public intoxication, drunk and disorderly, etc.), disorderly conduct, vagrancy, blackmail, bribery, kidnapping, perjury, discrimination, and all other offenses excluding traffic violations.

The definition for high school dropout rate, used by the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, defines the rate as the percentage of 16 to 24 year-olds who have not graduated and are not enrolled in school or an equivalency program. This definition reveals the extent of failure to complete a high school education because it accounts for those who, for a variety of reasons, take longer to complete their education. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, which uses the Census Bureau's definition, reports three types of dropout rates: event rates reflect the percentage of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school; status rates reflect the percentage of the population in a given age range who have not finished high school or are not enrolled in school at one point in time; and cohort rates reflect the percentage of a single group of students who drop out over time. This study used the Census Bureau's current definition of high school dropout rate, because it is the method most often used by high schools.

POVERTY RATES

	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>98</u>
CABELL	16.3	19.1	20.3	21.8	21.3	20.5	19.5	18.1	16.2	16.6
KANAWHA	14.7	15.3	16.7	18.2	19.9	19	17.1	15.7	14.3	14.8
WAYNE	20.8	21.8	22.3	22.9	23.7	23.2	22.1	20.6	18.6	17.8
PUTNAM	9.6	12	12.2	12.4	12.3	11.9	11.4	10.2	9.5	8.7
DODDRIDGE	21.6	23	24.2	24.7	25	24.2	23.3	21	19.2	20.5
MCDOWELL	33.4	34.5	36.7	38.1	38.8	37.2	36.8	34.1	31.4	29.8
PENDLETON	15.5	17.1	17.9	17.2	16.3	15.9	16.6	14.8	13.4	13.8
FAYETTE	22.7	24.4	25.8	26.4	27.8	27.3	25.8	23.5	21.2	21.8

HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES

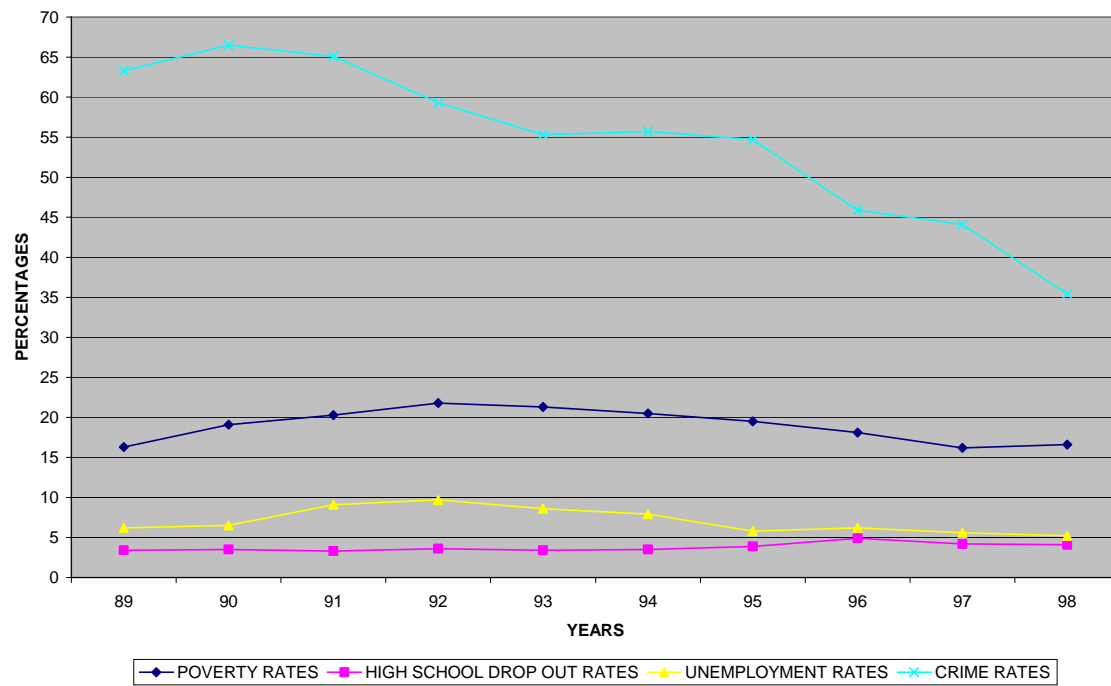
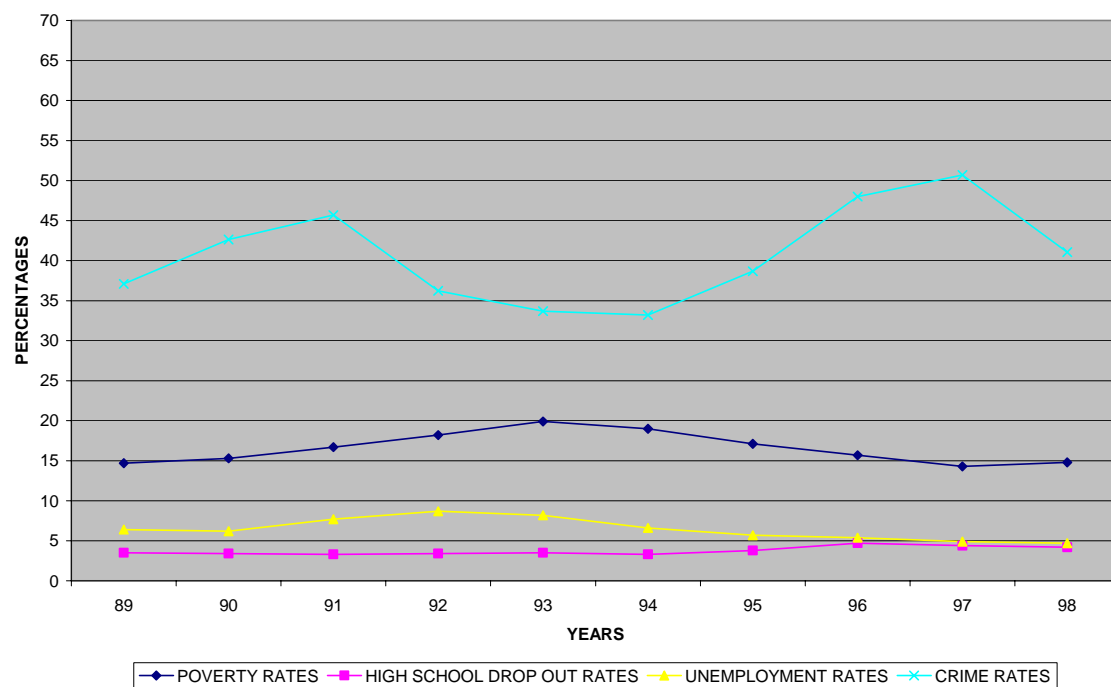
	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>98</u>
CABELL	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.9	4.9	4.2	4.1
KANAWHA	3.5	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.8	4.7	4.4	4.2
WAYNE	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.6	5.2	5.3	5.1	5.2
PUTNAM	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.8	5	5.1	5.3	5
DODDRIDGE	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.6	4.3	3.3	3.6
MCDOWELL	3.9	3.8	4	4.1	3.9	3.8	4	4.4	4.3	4.2
PENDLETON	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.8	4	4.3	4.2	4
FAYETTE	4.6	4.4	5	4.9	4.8	5	5.1	4.9	5	5.2

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

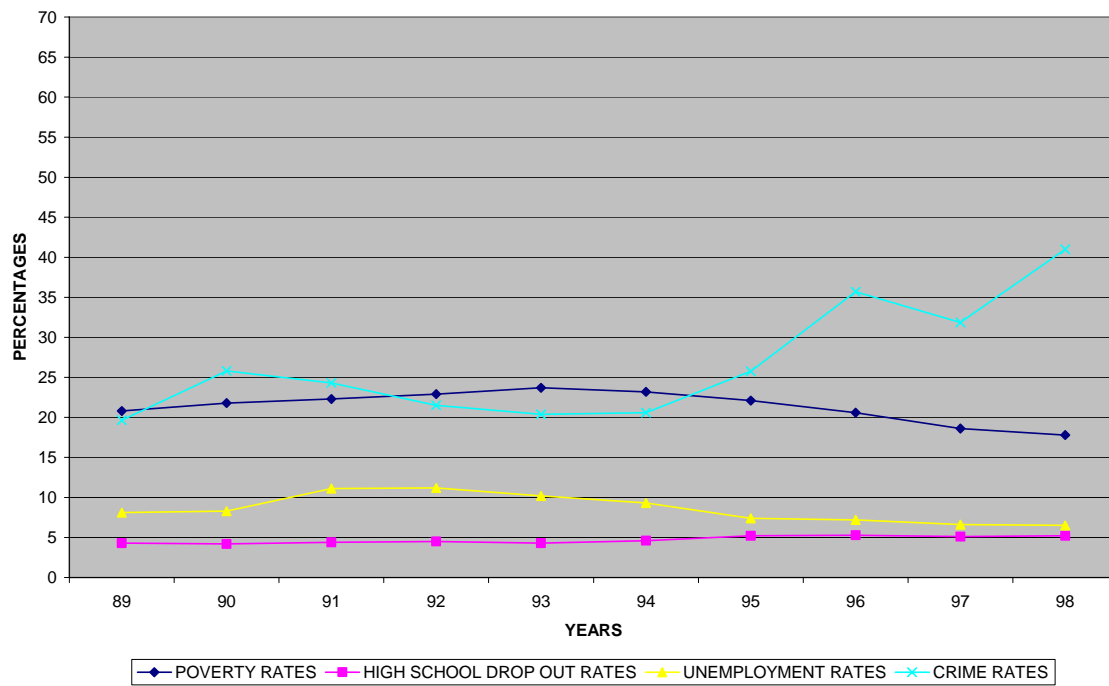
	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>98</u>
CABELL	6.2	6.5	9.1	9.7	8.6	7.9	5.8	6.2	5.6	5.2
KANAWHA	6.4	6.2	7.7	8.7	8.2	6.6	5.7	5.4	4.9	4.7
WAYNE	8.1	8.3	11.1	11.2	10.2	9.3	7.4	7.2	6.6	6.5
PUTNAM	6.9	7	8.7	9.4	8.1	6.7	5.5	5.3	4.7	4.7
FAYETTE	10.6	11.1	13.7	14.8	14.4	12.7	10.8	9.6	9.3	9.3
MCDOWELL	17.4	13	18	16.1	15	14	12.4	12.7	10.7	11.8
DODDRIDGE	9.4	7.4	7.2	10.1	10.6	9	8.3	7.4	6.2	7.8
PENDLETON	3.9	5.7	6.8	4.9	4.7	5.1	4.8	4.1	3.6	3.7

CRIME RATES

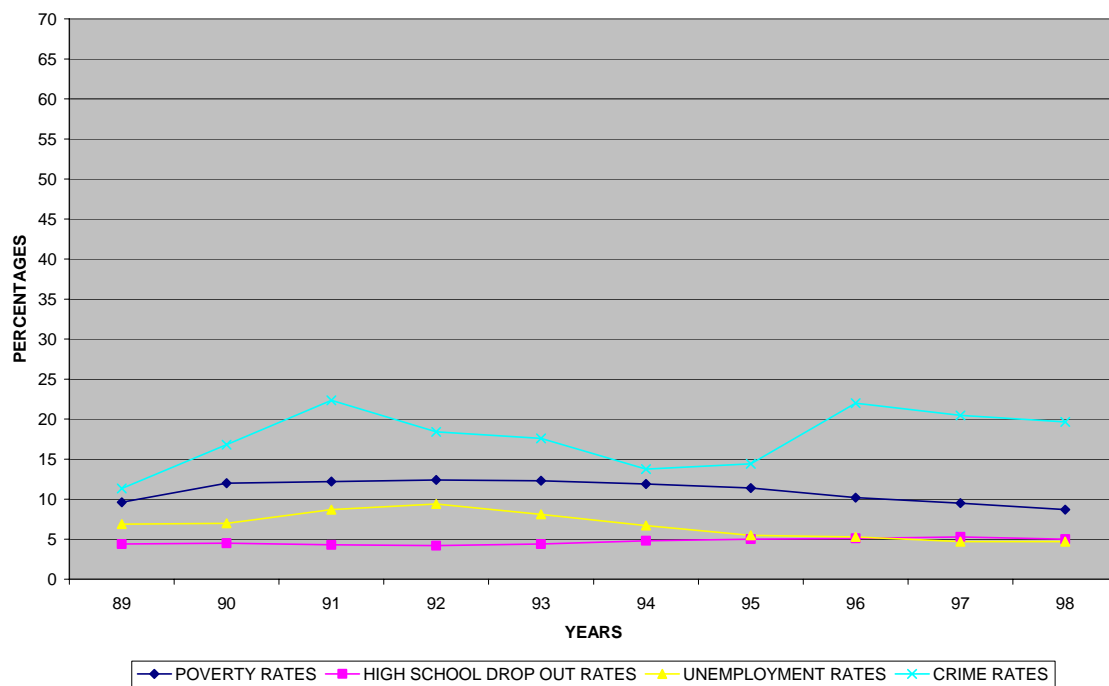
	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>96</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>98</u>
CABELL	63.3	66.5	65.1	59.3	55.3	55.7	54.7	45.9	44.1	35.43
KANAWHA	37.1	42.65	45.7	36.23	33.7	33.2	38.67	48	50.7	41.06
WAYNE	19.66	25.8	24.3	21.5	20.4	20.6	25.76	35.71	31.85	40.98
PUTNAM	11.34	16.8	22.36	18.4	17.6	13.75	14.41	22	20.48	19.65
FAYETTE	23.86	28.58	35.8	32.86	36.06	32.8	41.47	45.22	46.25	42.7
MCDOWELL	42.4	43.4	57.68	39.4	34.7	34.4	24.38	15.88	30.6	18.91
DODDRIDGE	14.24	18.58	12.04	13.8	16.04	13.15	19.25	21.78	21.58	24.48
PENDLETON	19.04	19.42	23.78	16.45	23.7	14.4	12.16	19.9	24.9	14.5

CABELL COUNTY 5:1**KANAWHA COUNTY 5:2**

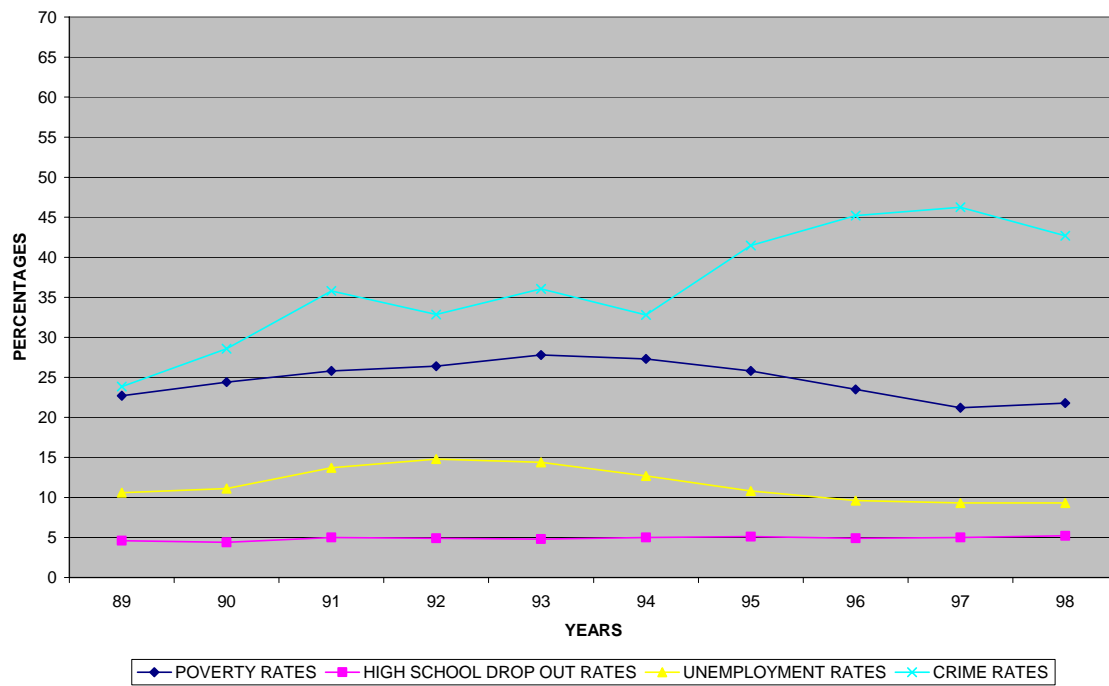
WAYNE COUNTY 5:3



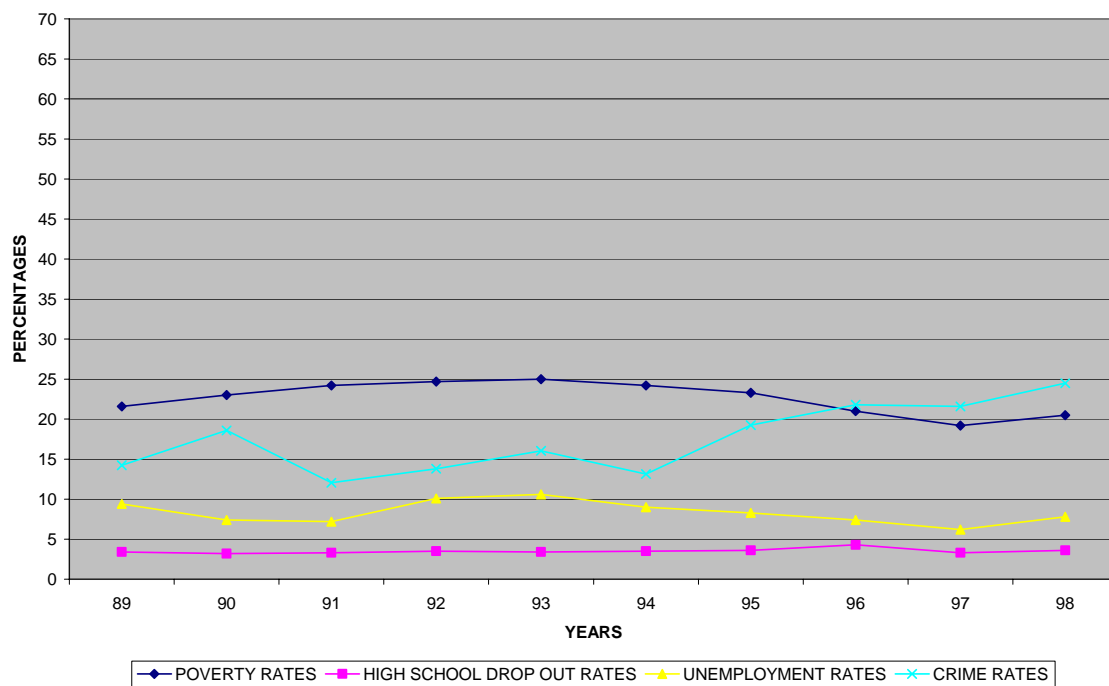
PUTNAM COUNTY 5:4



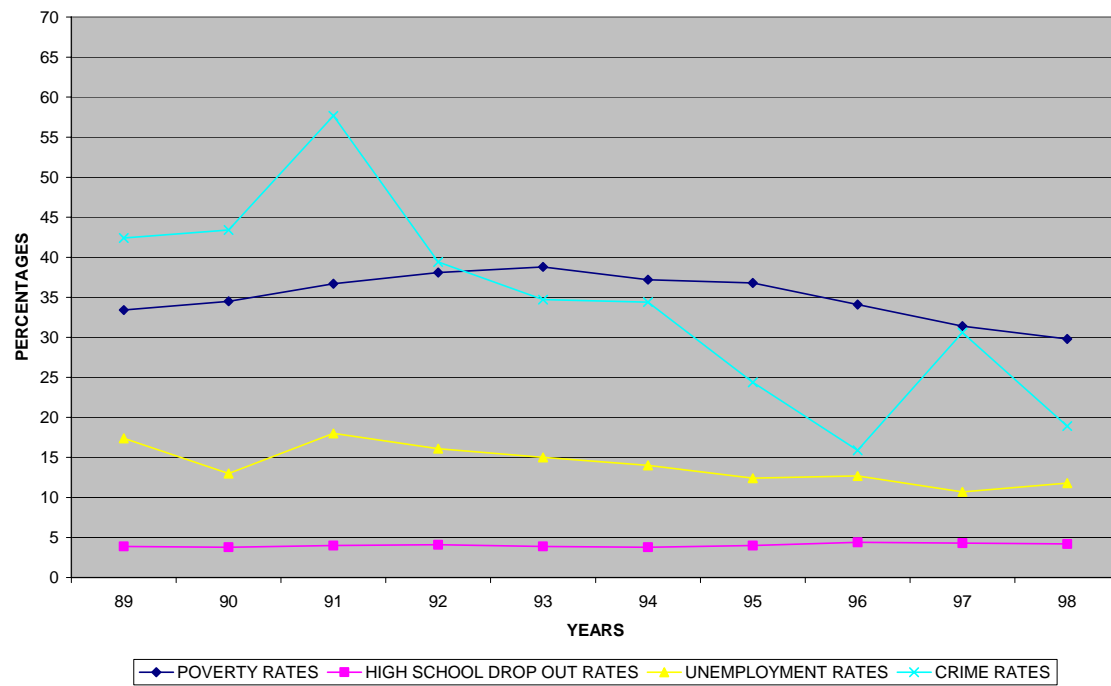
FAYETTE COUNTY 5:5



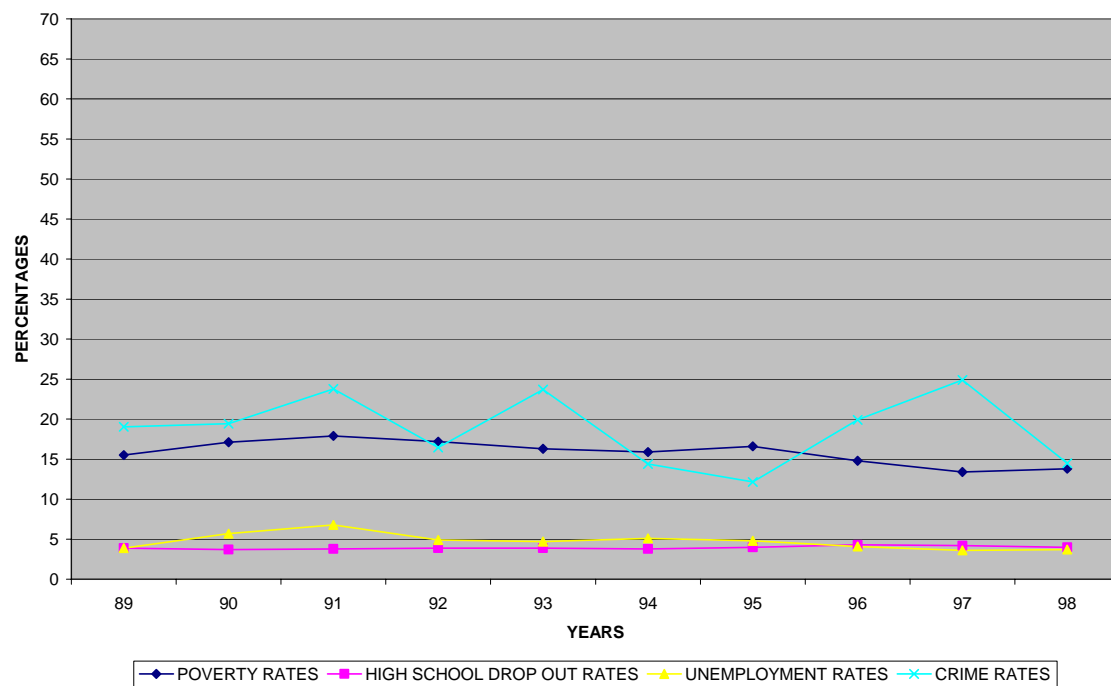
DODDRIDGE COUNTY 5:6



MCDOWELL COUNTY 5:7



PENDLETON COUNTY 5:8



V. ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study revealed both similarities and differences when comparing the independent and dependent variables for Cabell and Kanawha County. The high school dropout rates were almost identical for both counties during the ten year period [see figure 5:1 & 5:2]. Cabell County's high school dropout rate averaged 3.78%, while Kanawha County's high school dropout rate averaged 3.75%. Both counties experienced a slight increase in dropout rate starting in 1995.

The unemployment rates for both counties also showed similar trends. Unemployment increased in 1991, remained stable until 1993, and then decreased steadily [see figure 5:1 & 5:2]. Cabell County, with an average of 7.08%, had slightly higher rates of unemployment than Kanawha County, which had an average of 6.45% for the ten year period.

Poverty rates for the two counties were similar as well. Both counties experienced a poverty rate of around 15% for 1989, which then increased during the period 1990-92. In 1993, the poverty rates for both counties, around 20%, started to decrease slowly [see figure 5:1 & 5:2]. Kanawha County's average poverty rate was 16.57%, while Cabell County's poverty rate averaged 18.97%.

Crime trends for the two counties were much different. Cabell County's crime rate was around 65% for the years 1989, 90, and 91, then decreased to 55% by 1993, leveled off, and again started a gradual decrease beginning in 1995 [see figure 5:1 & 5:2]. Cabell County's crime rate was at 35% in 1998, a substantial reduction from rates at the beginning of the decade. Kanawha County's crime rate was 37.1% in 1989. It increased slightly in 1990 and 91 to 45%, then decreased to 33.2% in 1994. The crime rate then

started increasing again for the years 1995, 96, and 97, reaching just over 50%, then dropped slightly in 1998. While Cabell showed an overall steady decline during the ten year period, Kanawha County experienced an increase, then decline, and then another increase. Cabell County's average crime rate was 54.53%, while Kanawha County's average crime rate for the ten year period was 40.7%. Cabell County's higher crime rate could be due, in part, to its higher unemployment and poverty rates. Higher crime rates also may have been due to its geographic location.

The high school dropout rate for Putnam, Wayne, and Fayette County was very similar for the ten year period. All three suburban counties had a dropout rate of around 5%, which was slightly higher than the two more urbanized counties of Cabell and Kanawha [see figures 5:3, 5:4, & 5:5]. All three counties also experienced a very slight increase in the dropout rate during this period.

The unemployment rates for all three suburban counties showed similar trends, with a slight increase, followed by a slight decrease during the ten year period. Wayne and Putnam County had similar unemployment rates, with averages of 8.46% and 6.7% respectively, while Fayette's average unemployment rate of 12.6% was somewhat higher.

Putnam County had much lower poverty rates when compared to the two other counties. All three counties showed a relatively stable poverty rate, with slight increases in the middle of the ten year period, and slight decreases towards the end. Wayne County had an average poverty rate of around 23%, while Fayette County's average rate was slightly higher, around 25%. Putnam County's average poverty rate was around 11%.

Crime trends for the three suburban counties were somewhat similar. Although Wayne and Fayette had higher rates of crime, all three counties experienced an increase,

followed by a decrease, and then another increase [see figures 5:3, 5:4, & 5:5]. Wayne and Fayette County did experience increases in crime rates while unemployment and poverty rates dropped, suggesting that there could be other variables influencing crime and delinquent behavior. Putnam County, overall, had lower rates of crime when compared to the two other counties. This could be because of less rapid social change and greater social controls (less poverty and unemployment rates) within the county. The average crime rate for Putnam County was 17.67%, Wayne County's average was 26.6%, and Fayette County's average was 36.5%.

Pendleton, Doddridge, and McDowell County had the lowest rates of high school dropout between the three groups, all three averaging below 4% [see figures 5:6, 5:7, & 5:8]. All three rural counties experienced relatively stable rates of high school dropout for the ten year period with slight increases occurring towards the end.

Unemployment rates for the three rural counties were very different, although all three counties experienced the same trends, a slight increase, followed by a slow, gradual decrease. Pendleton County's average unemployment rate was approximately 5%, Doddridge County's average rate was 8.3%, and McDowell County's average rate was 14.1%.

Poverty rates for all three rural counties revealed some similarities and differences. The overall trends for the three counties shows a relatively stable pattern of a slight increase towards the middle of the period, followed by a slight decrease towards the end of the period. Pendleton's average poverty rate was roughly 16.5% for the ten year period, while Doddridge had an average poverty rate of 23%, and McDowell had an average of 35%.

Crime rates for the three counties were very dissimilar, in regards to overall trends and averages [see figures 5:6, 5:7, & 5:8]. Doddridge County had an average crime rate, 17.5%, that was lower than its poverty rate, a phenomenon that this study found to be very interesting. Pendleton County experienced a fluctuating crime rate for the ten year period, with periods of increase, followed by periods of decrease, and finally increases again. Pendleton's average crime rate was 18.8%. McDowell County experienced a great increase in crime rate between 1990 and 1991, then rates gradually decreased until 1996, when the crime rates experienced another sharp increase. McDowell County's average crime rate was 34.1%, almost doubling the rate when compared to the other two counties. This statistical anomaly could be because of the high rates of poverty and unemployment, which in turn, could affect the levels of social control within the county.

When analyzing these charts it is apparent that there are some cases when both the independent and dependent variables increase and decrease at the same times, suggesting that there is a possible relationship between the variables. Low levels of poverty and unemployment rates also seem to influence low crime rates. Social controls and rapid social change would thus play a large part in determining levels of crime. However, there are also instances when crime rates increase as poverty and unemployment rates decrease, suggesting that there are other variables responsible for increasing rates of crime. Further research from this study has found that a low unemployment rate does not necessarily mean that people or the community have more social control. Often, individuals, especially in West Virginia, are employed but have very low paying jobs, causing economic strain and hardship, which could possibly lead to increased crime and deviance.

Future research should explore different variables other than poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rate, such as population mobility, to determine if they appear to have a greater influence or relationship to crime rates. Qualitative studies could be used to examine individuals committing the crimes, to determine the reasoning behind them.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.

There are many limitations that have been encountered while working on this project. Correlation does not mean causation. This can become a big problem in research studies. What the study has been investigating is how poverty, unemployment, high school dropout and crime rates fluctuate over a period of years for the eight counties in West Virginia that the study has selected. When undertaking a study of this nature you cannot assume that just because there is a rise in crime and a rise in poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout that the variables are directly related.

Another problem is that there are a lot of different theories that examine crime rates, unemployment, and poverty. Deciding on which one to use is difficult because all make important points and assumptions. There is also evidence, through studies, that both support and reject these different theories. The social disorganization theory, which has been used in this study, has some problems associated with it. First, the theory confuses cause and effect. That is, it describes community factors related to crime and deviance, but it doesn't distinguish the consequences of crime from the disorganization itself (Short, 1976). The concept of disorganization is not well defined which makes it a vague term. Second, social disorganization is rather subjective and judgmental, while stating that it is in fact objective. Observers can fail to free themselves from biases and

placed their own value judgments on behaviors. Third, it tries to explain crime as an almost entirely lower-class phenomenon, and in no way includes middle and upper class deviance and crime rates. Thus, it is biased, in the fact that it favors middle and upper classes, who are presumed to be at a lower risk. Those in the lower strata are assumed to have higher rates of crime because their members live in the most socially disorganized areas of the city (Short, 1976). Fourth, social change is often confused with social disorganization, and little attention is paid to explain why some social changes are disorganized and why others are organized. Despite these problems, social disorganization theory is useful for the study because it deals with the social structure of an area or community, which is important when studying rural crime, unemployment, and poverty.

Another problem the study has encountered is the term poverty itself. There are many definitions for poverty, including the official poverty rate provided by the United States Census Bureau. Another way to look at poverty is simply not being able to buy the things you need in order to have a good quality of life. The poverty rates change every year, due to economic factors, such as changes in the costs of living. Another problem is that the poverty rate is determined by the same thresholds for the entire United States, and does not vary geographically.

An additional limitation of this study is crime rate. When dealing with types of offenses, often different policing agencies will record these offenses differently. Not all the crimes occurring in the counties in my study are reported to the police. If crime rates do increase, is it because of increasing unemployment and poverty or because of more effective policing strategies? When conducting a study of this type you have to be

careful not to commit ecological fallacy. The study needs to be sure that the rising crime rates are being caused by poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout before making that assumption, and not some other unseen factor. Determining that the people living in poverty and experiencing unemployment are the ones committing the crimes can be difficult. The Uniform Crime Reports are often criticized for specifically targeting minorities and members of the lower class, so again it is important to make sure who it is that is committing the crimes in my study.

The study has already discussed some of the limitations with unemployment rates, but it will be useful to mention them again briefly. A person who loses a 40 hour per week job, but works for one hour doing anything for pay is considered employed. A person who simply expresses interest in having a job is classified as unemployed. “Discouraged workers” who have lost a job, but do not make an effort to find a new job in a given week are not classified as unemployed or even in the labor force. These problems mean that there are probably many unemployed persons who are not even considered unemployed.

The final limitation in this study deals with the way high school dropout rate is measured. Gaustad (1991), reports that the definition of a dropout varies widely, with different states, districts, and even schools, within districts, using the term differently. For example, some districts may not include students who drop out over the summer, or who leave school to get married, while others do include them in the dropout total. In addition, some districts may keep more complete records than others. For example, some districts follow up on students who do not return after the summer to determine whether or not they are enrolled in other schools, while other districts do not. Other variations

may include whether or not certain types of non-traditional students, those who leave regular high school before graduation to enter correctional facilities, enroll in G.E.D. programs, or enter college, are counted as dropouts until they have completed an equivalency program (McMillen, 1994).

A study of the social disorganization theory and its effects on rural crime is important for several reasons. First, this study compares rural crime in specific areas in West Virginia. Rural crime has not traditionally received much attention from scholars, because much of the research dealing with crime and delinquency examines only crime in urban settings (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Second, this study compares different counties in West Virginia based on their likelihood of experiencing rapid social change. It also observes varying levels of social control within these different areas, by looking at factors such as poverty, unemployment, and high school dropout rate. Third, this study uses the social disorganization theory which, after being ignored for many years, has received increasing attention from scholars who are looking to explain current trends in crime rates by examining the social forces and change in the environment. Finally, this study is important because much of the research and literature on crime and factors that influence it are inconclusive. If a relationship could be determined through more research, more effective policies could be developed and implemented to help reduce crime and the factors that cause it

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